

Facilitation Center Helps Officers Think Outside the Box

Build relationships
Define action
Generate solutions
Make progress
Reach consensus



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Old habits are hard to break. Policies that have been in place for decades that just aren't working anymore are hard to redesign with fresh ideas. Finding new ways to stretch exhausted budgets is never easy.

Sometimes it takes a new way of thinking to get it done.

That's just what Eastern Kentucky University's Facilitation Center is all about. Recently, the Department of Criminal Justice Training's Leadership Development Section decided to introduce facilitation training as part of its Criminal Justice Executive Development Course. It is a style

that fits well with the role CJED provides for Kentucky's law enforcement leaders.

"CJED is heavy with discussion about the future of policing," said Leadership Development Training Instructor Alvina Maynard. "These leaders are transitioning from operational to strategic roles of responsibility in their departments. They're going from working within the structure of their department to being the leaders that shape that structure and culture.

"These problem-solving techniques will help CJED graduates work through challenges in a methodical way, which encourages creativity and open-mindedness while maintaining focus," Maynard continued.

HOW FACILITATION CAN HELP

The Facilitation Center became a part of EKU's College of Justice and Safety in 2003, said Stefanie Ashley, a facilitation services specialist at the center. Since then, the staff with a combined 30 years of facilitation experience has conducted various types of trainings and occupational analysis, as well as facilitated meetings for both the university and other clients across the country.

"Our role as a facilitator is to be a neutral party that guides the process of a meeting and not the content," Ashley said. "The participants are the experts and we create space and time for them to share their ideas and thoughts in a creative, productive

manner. In this capacity, we can help groups plan, solve problems, make decisions and increase their effectiveness.”

During the CJED class, officers entered the classroom to find their desks filled with silly toys, brightly-colored papers, scented markers, stacks of illustrated post cards, stickers and other oddities. Ashley explained that all of these items had a purpose.

Step by step, the officers used visuals like the post cards to generate ideas and perspectives. They used non-traditional “non-cop” items, as they called them, to access their creativity, such as the toys and even yoga and cooking magazines. They used activities to build on the ideas of their classmates and set ground rules such as, “avoid criticism” and “we let all ideas live for now,” to discourage negativity.

From there, the class was able to use other challenges presented by Ashley to define issues, prioritize them, brainstorm and work toward solutions.

“Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results,” Ashley said. “We are sometimes confronted with situations where the solutions, concepts and

ideas we’ve historically called upon are not working. So, when you’re trying to solve a problem, the ability to generate creative solutions can mean the difference between success and a strong desire to bang your head against a wall.”

THE TEAM DYNAMIC

In today’s law enforcement, many officers have to work both independently on their beats and simultaneously as part of their shift team. The facilitation training is geared toward those who work well independently and as part of a team.

“When designing a brainstorming activity, you need to plan it in a way that caters to both strengths, such as allowing a few minutes for each person to individually write down their own ideas, then begin to share them as a group,” Ashley said.

“However, at the end of the day, the key to brainstorming is the group interaction. Independently, we can all come up with answers to a question, but when those ideas are displayed and shared, the ideas begin to build upon each other and the creative juices flow even more rapidly.”

This type of “out of the box” thinking is more important than ever as agencies

continue to look for innovative ways to do more with less, said Leadership Development Training Section Supervisor Rich Hanzes.

“The section on brain storming gives the aspiring executives a practical way to facilitate an open-ended, thought-provoking discussion that focuses on addressing the many challenges that confront their agencies,” he said.

When an agency needs to address a situation and chooses to bring a group together to do so, the result can be particularly valuable, Ashley said, because people remember what they see, what they help create and are more likely to be invested in the outcome.

“Sharing ideas and information also allows a group to better understand the problem and get behind solving it,” she said. “Brainstorming should eventually lead to rich discussions, an awareness of the various perspectives and, ultimately, a greater understanding of the topic and solutions. People are more likely to be invested in an issue if they are involved in solving it.”

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▲ From left, Criminal Justice Executive Development students Chad Carpenter, Elsmere Police; Chris Castlen, Owensboro Police; Leadership Development Training Instructor Alvina Maynard and Michael Felts, Hopkinsville Police; discuss challenges facing law enforcement with Jason Hays, Berea Police (unseen). The CJED class was challenged to work together as a team to discuss the issues as part of the facilitation training presented by Stefanie Ashley.



▲ Stefanie Ashley is a Facilitation Services specialist for Eastern Kentucky University's Facilitation Center. The center is designed to help professionals be more productive in their meetings and to think creatively about new ideas and solutions.